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Spinoza and his Relationship to the Hermeneutics of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Super-Commentaries and the Semantics of Narrative

Abstract: In this article, I will seek to clarify the nature of Spinoza's relationship to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. First, by analyzing Spinoza's thesis concerning the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TTP). Then I will confront this thesis with the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra himself, and with some great commentaries devoted to them. Finally, I will propose a semantic approach to the different narrative levels of the biblical text, capable of resolving several textual difficulties that drew Spinoza's attention.

Keywords: Spinoza, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, super-commentaries, hermeneutics, narrative, semantics, Midrash, Historical criticism

The theoretical approaches of R. Ibn Ezra (1089/1092-1167) and Spinoza (1632-1677) have been compared, emphasizing their common interest in the philology of Hebrew, in the interpretation of the Bible, their preference for its literal reading (*psbat*) to the detriment of homiletical reading, as well as the importance of scientific knowledge.² It is the elliptical

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¹ Concerning the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch, I have used the classic edition of the Miqra'ot Gedolot. The scientific edition can be found in the Keter Edition (Menahem Cohen, Ed.), Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, 2022. I used also the version published by H. Kreisel (Ed.), Hamishah qadmone mefarshay R. Abraham Eben 'Ezra. Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion University Press, 2007. Concerning Spinoza's works, all translations from Hebrew and Latin are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Regarding the works of Spinoza, I refer to the Latin edition: Baruch de Spinoza Opera, edited by Carl Gebhardt, Heidelberg, Universitätsbuchhandlung Carl Winter, 1925. However, regarding the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus I use the Latin text established by Fokke Akkerman and published bilingually by Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François. Moreau, *Traité Théologico-Politique*. Paris, PUF, 1999. The English translations of Spinoza's texts are mine. Regarding the transliteration of Hebrew, I have generally followed the system of Ch. L. Echols and Th. Legrand Transliteration of Hebrew Consonants, Vowels, and Accents, etc. Academia.edu.

https://www.academia.edu/5388085/Transliteration_of_Hebrew_Consonants_Vowels_and_Accents_etc

² Tamar M. Rudavsky, The Science of Scripture: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Spinoza on Biblical Hermeneutics. In Steven Nadler, Ed., *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*.

character of R. Ibn Ezra's interpretations that allowed Spinoza to project into them what has been called his "Marranism of reason," which forced him to hide his inner thoughts and philosophical truth from the multitude.³ Indeed, according to Spinoza, R. Ibn Ezra really thought that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*. However, because of the relentlessness of the Pharisees, he could not openly support his thesis. Spinoza thus praises R. Ibn Ezra, describing him as "a man of freer complexion and great erudition" (*liberioris ingenii vir et non mediocris eruditionis*), and he emphasizes that he had to hide his own opinions because "he did not dare to explain his thought openly" (*non ausus est mentem suam aperte explicare*).⁴ This article aims to examine the use that Spinoza makes of R. Abraham Ezra's texts, confronting it with the literal analysis that should be made of this author. In doing so, it points out the probable influence that the super-commentaries on R. Abraham Ezra's hermeneutics may have had on Spinoza.

The ambiguous relations of Spinoza to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

Recall that contrary to the apparent esteem which Spinoza expressed with respect to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, in Chapter II of the *TTP* Spinoza opposes R. Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the etymology of the term prophecy (*nevu'ah*), stressing that he "did not have an exact knowledge of Hebrew" (*qui linguam Hebraicam non adeo exacte novit*), despite that R. Ibn Ezra is considered one of the greatest Hebraist of the Middle Ages, having himself written five books of Hebrew grammar.⁵ Nevertheless, Spinoza developed his criticism of the Bible on the basis of the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra. Spinoza began by examining his explanation of the verse of *Deuteronomy* I: 2, including what he calls the "mystery of the twelve" (*mysterium duodecim*): "On the other side of the Jordan, through the wilderness, in the Araba.... If you understand the secret of the twelve" as well as "and Moses wrote" (*Deuteronomy* 31:9), "and the Canaanites were then in the land" (*Genesis* 12:6), "on the mountain God will appear" (*Genesis* 22:14), "here is his bestead, an iron bedstead, then you will recognize the truth." (*Deuteronomy* I:2). If Spinoza quotes the words of R. Ibn Ezra in full, he also specifies what R. Ibn Ezra never said explicitly: "With these few words, he indicates and at the same time establishes, that it was not Moses who wrote the *Pentateuch* but someone else who lived much later; and finally

Cambridge University Press, 2014: 59-60

³ Yirmiah Yovel, *Spinoza and other heretics*. Princeton University Press, 1989, 92

⁴ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, VIII, 3, 326-327

⁵ Luba R. Charlap, Abraham Ibn-Ezra's viewpoint regarding the Hebrew language and the biblical text in the context of medieval environment. *Folia linguistica histórica*. 26, 1-2, 2005, 1-12. Cf. Jacques J. Rozenberg, The Spinozist Conception of Prophecy versus the Jewish Traditional Commentaries. *Philosophy & Theology*. 35, 1, 2024:77-110.

that the book written by Moses was another work" (*His autem paucis indicat simulque ostendit non fuisse Mosen, qui Pentateuchon scripsit, sed alium quempiam, qui longe post vixit, et denique quem Moses scripsit librum, alium fuisse*).⁶ It should be noted that Spinoza used the commentary of R. Ibn Ezra published by Johannes Buxtorf I.⁷ However, this text does not mention all the versions of the commentary, unlike the *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, a work that Spinoza did not own, but that he certainly knew. Indeed, this work points out, in parentheses, on the verse of *Deuteronomy* 1:2, next to the word "shnaym" (two), that of "sarym" (princes), and Spinoza in fact took up this version because Buxtorf's version, mentioning "ten princes" (*ba-sarym 'eser*) that did not seem comprehensible to him.⁸ However, if we retain the version not retained by Spinoza, instead of speaking of the last twelve verses of the *Pentateuch* as Spinoza would eventually admit, we can understand, as Michael Friedlander proposes, that in fact R. Ibn Ezra refers to the sacrifices of the twelve princes or chiefs (*nesy'im*) mentioned in the verses of *Numbers* 7 : 12-83. He would then express his astonishment at the repetition, twelve times and without the slightest variation, of the sacrifices that the princes have brought at the time of the inauguration of the Tabernacle. As a result, R. Ibn Ezra would then not refer to the last twelve verses of *Deuteronomy*.⁹ Also according to Friedlander, the expression commonly used by R. Ibn Ezra: "it involves a mystery (or a secret)" (*yesh lo sod*), and underlined by Spinoza, never expresses any critical research concerning the coherence of a biblical text or the authenticity of one of its authors, but it refers to a philosophical aspect that R. Ibn Ezra thinks he has identified in certain passages of the Bible.¹⁰ The notion of mystery or secret (*sod*) refers to notions or situations whose true meanings are not always understood by people. From a textual point of view, it simply connotes the different significations that can be deduced from certain verses of the Bible.¹¹ This remark helps to understand why R. Ibn Ezra criticized Christian biblical hermeneutics for constantly inventing "deep meaning" (*sod*).¹²

⁶ Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 3, 326-327

⁷ Lagré and Moreau, French translation of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 749, note 68.

⁸ Johannes Buxtorf, *Biblia Sacra Hebraica & Chaldaica Masora*. L. König, 1618-1619, 191. The version in Gerhardt's Edition (III, 119), which presents the Hebrew expression "hashlym 'eser" is also defective.

⁹ Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*. London, The Society of Hebrew Literature, 1877, 65

¹⁰ Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 62-65

¹¹ H. Norman Strickman, Abraham ibn Ezra's "Yesod Mora." *Hakirah*. 12, 2011, 140

¹² Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimbi*. Brill, 2003, 36

The six critical statements of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra according to Spinoza

In suport of his thesis, Spinoza attributes six statements to R. Ibn R. Ibn Ezra¹³:

1. The first verses of *Deuteronomy*, mentioned above, could not have been written by Moses who did not cross the Jordan (*Mose, qui Jordanem non transivit, scribi non potuit*). However, R. Ibn Ezra limits himself to remarking that these first verses were pronounced in the desert (*bamidbar*), in the plain (*be'aravah*) of the Jordan, without suggesting that Moses was not the author of them. And R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady (1335-1388) specifies that according to R. Ibn Ezra, only the last twelve verses of *Deuteronomy* were written by Joshua.¹⁴ This author composed, in Jerusalem three years before his death, a super-commentary entitled *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. Even though the work was not published until 1722 in Amsterdam, it seems likely that Spinoza read a copy of the manuscript of this work.¹⁵

2. Spinoza remarks that "the entire book of Moses was transcribed on the sole edge of a single altar (cf. *Deuteronomy* 27: 2-3, and *Joshua* 8:31, etc.), which, according to the rabbis' account, consisted of only twelve stones; from which it appears that the book of Moses was much less extensive than the *Pentateuch*." (*quod totus liber Mosis descriptus fuerit admodum diserte in solo ambitu unius arae* (vide Deuter. Cap. 27. & Josuae, Cap. 8. v. 31. etc.), *quae ex Rabinorum relatione duodecim tantum lapidibus constabat; ex quo sequitur librum Mosis longè minoris fuisse molis, quam Pentateuchon*). However, R. Ibn Ezra, on the verses of *Deuteronomy* 27:1-2, does not mention the question of the completeness of the *Pentateuch*, nor the installation of twelve stones, but he limits himself to pointing out that in order to respect all the commandments (*shmor 'et kol ha-miçvoth*) it was necessary to establish some large stones (*'avanym gedolot*) capable of encompassing the content of the Torah. He also reports R. Saadya Gaon's explanation of this verse, to which he subscribes, notifying that it was by no means the whole of the *Pentateuch*, but only a few commandments (*mispar miçvoth*), such as the warnings (*hazharot*). Spinoza then attributes to R. Ibn Ezra the thesis that has been described as "curious," according to which the expression "mystery of the twelve"

¹³ Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 3, 326-333; Raphael Jospe, *Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Academic Studies Press, 2009, 184-188

¹⁴ R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. Reedition. Krakow, 1912, Vol. I, 63.

¹⁵ The work of R. Yoseph Tov ben 'Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfaradi was published in 1722 in Amsterdam, under the title '*Ohel Yoseph*, and included the work of R. Yequy'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Torah*. Amsterdam, 1722. It should be noted that the original title of the manuscript does not appear in the catalogue of the *Eç Hayyim* Library in Amsterdam. However, there is mention of a manuscript with the same title by R. Shem Tov Shafrut who also comments on R. Abaham Ibn Ezra's commentary on the *Pentateuch*. Cf. R. Shabtaye ben Yoseph Bass, *Siftey Yesbanym*. Amsterdam, 1680, 65.

(*mysterium duodecim*) refers to the twelve stones, which R. Ibn Ezra does not mention at all in his commentary on *Deuteronomy* 27:1-2.¹⁶

3. Spinoza writes that R. Ibn Ezra "remarks that it is said (*Deuteronomy* 31:9): And Moses wrote the Law-terms which cannot be of Moses, but are of another writer who records the acts and writings of Moses (*dici in Deuter. cap. 31. v. 9. et scripsit Moses legem; quae quidem verba non possunt esse Mosis, sed alterius scriptoris, Mosis facta et scripta narrantis*). Now, in his commentary on *Deuteronomy* 31:9, R. Ibn Ezra limits himself to specifying two things: first, that the Levites are the teachers of the Torah (*morey ha-Torah*), and second, that the expression "Elders of Israel" refers to the members of the *Sanhedryn* (legislative and judicial assembly). He does not make the slightest allusion to the fact that this verse could not have been written by Moses.

4. Spinoza emphasizes the remark of R. Ibn Ezra on the verse of *Genesis* 12: 6 "the Canaanite was then in the land," clearly ruling out that this was still the case at the time this verse was written. This is what R. Ibn Ezra, in his note on this passage, is indicating in the words: "and the Canaanite was then in that land; it seems that Canaan (a grandson of Noah) took the land of the Canaanite which was in the hands of another; if this is not true, there is a mystery in this thing, and who understands it should be silent (*yesh lo sod we-ha-maskyl ydom*)." That is, if Canaan invaded those regions, then the sense will be that 'the Canaanite was already in that land at that time' as distinct from a previous period when it was inhabited by another people. But if Canaan was the first to cultivate those regions (as follows from *Genesis* Ch. 10), then the text excludes the present time, i.e. the time of the writer, which is not therefore the time of Moses, because in his time they still possessed that territory. This is the mystery about which Ibn Ezra recommends silence.¹⁷ Spinoza's conclusion that Moses could not have been the writer of this verse, and that "this is the mystery (which Ibn Ezra) recommends keeping quiet." (*hoc est mysterium, quod tacendum commendat*) seems to be in accordance with the super-commentary of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady. However, the latter emphasizes that, in the event that the Canaanite had not conquered his land from another people, the

¹⁶ Warren Zev Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." In Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Michael A. Rosenthal (Eds). *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise. A Critical Guide*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 51. Harvey, (54), reminds us that Spinoza may have been influenced by his reading of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes speaks of the twelve stones, pointing out, however, against Spinoza's assertion, that on these stones the entire *Pentateuch* was not reproduced. Hobbes, *Leviathan*. John C. A. Gaskin (Ed.). Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, 254 and 345.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *TTP* VIII, 4. I use here the English translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise* by Jonathan Israel, Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 120.

possible late writing of this verse would have been prophetic, and he adds: "It does not matter whether it was Moses who wrote it or whether another prophet wrote it (*mah ly shekatvo Mosheh 'o shekatvo navy' 'aher*) since their words are equally true, and they proceed from prophecy (*ho'yl we-divrey kulam 'emet ve-hem benevu'ah*)."¹⁸

As Spinoza would do, Hobbes, who seems to have had indirect access to R. Ibn Ezra's super-commentaries,¹⁹ also rejected the prophetic aspect of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady's remark. He first emphasized, with regard to the words attributed to Moses, describing his own death: "For it were a strange interpretation, to say Moses spoke of his own sepulcher (though by prophecy)," and then denied the authorship of Moses on the verse of *Genesis* 12:6: "and the Canaanite was then in the land; which must needs to be the words of one that wrote when the Canaanite was not in the land; and consequently, not of Moses, who died before he came into it."²⁰ However, as R. Yehuda Mosqony (approximately between 1327-1375) has pointed out, the majority of commentators on R. Ibn Ezra have gone misguided (*nevukn*) in trying to account for the author's real intention.²¹ Indeed, the term then (*'az*), can denote both a past or present event. In this sense, on the verse of *Genesis* 12:6, R. Ibn Ezra has only presented two possibilities of interpretation, one in the past and the other in the present. As R. Shmuel Tsarçah (second half of the 14th century) points out in his super-commentary *Meqor Hayym*, according to the first interpretive possibility, the term "'az" means that the Canaanite was not originally on his land, and in this case the verse does not imply any mystery. According to the second possibility, it was at the time of the writing of the verse that the Canaanite was no longer on his land, and there would then be a mystery because it would imply that Moses did not write it.²² Nevertheless,

¹⁸ R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. I, 91-92. The author refers to the Talmud Sanhedryn 99a, which qualifies as a heretic anyone who, while admitting that the entire Torah is of Divine origin except for a verse that would have been added by Moses. As I will explain later, according to R. Ibn Ezra, the prohibition of making any addition to the Biblical text concerns only the commandments and not the narrations. However, the Midrash Rabah Mishley noted that, in the verse of Proverbs 25:1, the term "he'etyqu" does not mean to copy, even less write, but indicates that Hezekiah's servants only "explained" (*pershu*) the Proverbs.

¹⁹ Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, 404-405. This author has emphasized the role of the Hebraist bishop, Alonso Tostado (Alphonsus Tostatus) (1410-1455) in the dissemination of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra among the Christian exegetes.

²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 33, 253

²¹ R. Yehuda Mosqony, *'Even ha-'Ezer*, Hayym Kreisel (Ed.), Ben Gurion University, Ma'kon Bialik, 2021, I, 117

²² R. Shmuel Tsarçah, *Meqor Hayym*. In R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Sefer margalyot tovah*. Amsterdam, 1722, 19a. Similarly, R. Mosheh ben Yehuda min ha-Na'arym (14th century) adheres to the first interpretation. In 'Ofer 'Ely'or, R. *Mosheh ben Yehuda min ha-*

R. Ibn Ezra only mentions this interpretive possibility, without however adhering to it. As R. Yoseph Caspi (1280-1345) points out, R. Ibn Ezra even rejects this second interpretation.

Indeed, when God decreed that Abraham would inherit the land of Canaan, Abraham then found that this land was dominated by Canaan, and he feared that God then gave up all power over this land, and so he might not inherit it. However, according to R. Yehuda Mosqony, the verse in *Genesis* 12:6 emphasizes the strength of God's promise concerning the inheritance of the land of Canaan, which was to take effect only when Abraham's descendants were sufficiently numerous.²³ This is why R. Ibn Ezra hypothesizes that it is possible that Canaan had previously conquered it from another people, which then left Abraham with hope of inheriting it, as Canaan had done previously. Otherwise, there would be a mystery, leaving Abraham's hope of inheriting this territory in vain, leading him to think that Divine Providence had abandoned the earthly world.²⁴ Even if the identity of the author of the *Perush ha-sodot le-R. Ibn Ezra* has been the subject of debate, and the authorship of R. Yoseph Caspi has been questioned,²⁵ it is worth recalling the remark of R. Yoseph Caspi, in his work *Parashat ha-Kesef*, concerning the verse of *Genesis* 12:6: "And the Canaanite was then on the earth." He then indicates that it was Moses who wrote it, thus emphasizing that for R. Ibn Ezra, Moses was indeed the author of this verse.²⁶ This is in fact what R. Ibn Ezra himself confirms in his Introduction to his commentary on the *Psalms*: "for there is no doubt among the Israelites that Moses our Master wrote the book of *Genesis*" (*key 'eyn safeq beyn ha-Isra'elym ky sefer Ber'eshyt ky Mosheh 'Adonenu katvu*).²⁷ Thus we can understand that the possible mystery concerning the verse of *Genesis* 12:6 does not concern its non-Mosaic redaction.²⁸

Na'arym. By'yur 'al ha-Torah me' and R. 'Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion University, 2015, 39.

²³ R. Yehuda Mosqony, *'Even ha-'Ezer*. H. Kreisel (Ed.), I, 118

²⁴ R. Yoseph Caspi, *Perush ha-sodot le-R. Ibn Ezra*. Pressburg, 1903, 152.

²⁵ Cf. Hannah Kosher, Lash'elat mehabero shel "By'yur ha-sodot le-R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a" ha-meyuhas le-Yosef 'Eben Kaspy. In Mosheh Hallamish (Ed.), *'Aley Shefer*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 1990, 108-189.

²⁶ R. Yoseph Caspi, *Parashat ha-Kesef*. In Hayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishab qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. 124. It should be noted that the editors of this work have nevertheless indicated in parentheses: "it must be said (*chayek l'omar*): and Moses did not write (*lo katav*)". However, the passage from the By'ur ha-sodot, and especially the statement of R. Ibn Ezra himself, in his commentary on the *Tehilim* that we are reporting, invalidates such a correction.

²⁷ R. Ibn Ezra, *Perush 'al Tehilim*, *Aqdamah*

²⁸ This is why the commentator of the *Avat Nefesh* maintains the Mosaic origin of the entire *Pentateuch*. In Hayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishab qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. 37 and 124-125. The author of the *Avat Nefesh* is still uncertain. Cf. William G. Gärtig, The attribution of the Ibn Ezra supercommentary "Avvat Nefesh" to Asher ben

5. Spinoza then notes that in the verse of *Genesis* 22:14, Mount Moriah is called "the mountain of God," whereas this place will in fact be identified as such only after the building of the Temple by Solomon, several centuries after Moses. Spinoza specifies that the name Moriah was given by the "historian" (*nempe ab historico*), and not by Abraham himself, as is mentioned in II *Chronicles* 3: 2, describing the construction of the First Temple by Solomon.²⁹ In fact, Moses did not specify on which mountain the Temple will be built, but he only noted: "The place that the Tetragrammaton will choose" to build it (*Deuteronomy* 12:11). Moses did not know the location, which would not be revealed until the time of King David. According to Spinoza, this would clearly prove that Moses was not the author of this verse. Moreover, the term "today" (*ha-yom*) must refer to the time of the Temple when it was possible to practice the three Pilgrimage festivals. Although R. Ibn Ezra also includes this verse in the "secret of the twelve," he does not mention the name Moriah. Following the *Midrash Syfry*, commentators emphasize that the expression "on the mountain where the Tetragrammaton will be seen" (*behar Ha-Shem Yr'aeh*), refers to the prophetic vision of the future Temple that God transmitted to Abraham.³⁰ Spinoza, denying the possibility of prophecy, could not accept such an exegesis, and he therefore preferred to note a disqualifying anachronism for the claim that Moses was the author of this verse. It should be noted that the name Moriah, contrary to what Spinoza suggests, does not appear in the verse of *Genesis* 22:14, to which he refers. This name is however indicated in the super-commentary of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha- ha-Sfarady, to suggest that this verse may have been written by later prophets and therefore also by prophecy.³¹ It is worth mentioning that this name being mentioned later in II *Chronicles* III: 2 does not contradict Abraham's prophecy concerning the future construction of the First Temple.

6. Spinoza then points out problems of a narrative nature. The verse of *Deuteronomy* III, 11 interpolates certain information in the account relating to 'Og, king of Bashan: "the only survivor among the *Ref'aym* (giants), 'Og, king of Bashan, and this is his bed, it was a bed of iron, for this bed is in Rabat among the sons of Ammon and is nine cubits long and four cubits wide according to the measurements of man." According to Spinoza, such a parenthesis (*parenthesis*) proves that it was placed by an author much later than Moses, since he himself did not enter the territory of

Abraham Crescas reconsidered, *Hebrew Union College Annual*. 66, 1995, 239-257.

²⁹ Spinoza, *TTP*, Annotation 9, 662-663

³⁰ *Syfry Devarym* 352; cf. Rashi and Rashbam on *Genesis* 22:14, Qely Yaqar on *Exodus*, 34:23.

³¹ R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. 112. The *Talmud* asks a similar question regarding the verse of *Genesis* 2:14, which states that the third tributary of the Edenic River is *Hydeqel*, which flows east of Ashur. Rav Yoseph specifies that 'Ashur is located in *Slyqa*, which in fact designates the future name of this place. *Qetubot* 10b.

Ammon and therefore could not have known the dimensions of this iron bed. This was not found until the time of David, who subdued the city of Rabat, as we can read in II *Samuel* 12: 30. This interpretation seems to have been suggested by R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer, who said that it was only when Yoav entered Rabat, under David's command, that he was then able to ascertain the dimensions of this bed.³² However, it should be noted that this passage from the book of *Samuel*, reported by Spinoza as proof of late information, makes no mention of the bed of 'Og but only of the crown of the king of the Ammonites which David seized. It is possible that Spinoza confused the anecdotes here, after reading the commentary of Rashbam, a contemporary of R. Ibn Ezra, specifying that the people of Ammon, having become aware of the divine prohibition against the Children of Israel to harm their territory and their property. They therefore placed the bed of Og in their capital Rabat. Rashbam adds that this city was then a royal city, as is reported precisely in the passage from the book of *Samuel* to which Spinoza refers.³³ In fact, as R. Yoseph ben 'Elyezer himself points out, the information that Moses could not obtain naturally was provided to him by prophecy.³⁴

It should be noted that R. Ibn Ezra's commentary on the *Pentateuch* had been written largely against the Karaites, whose rejection of the Oral Law had led to subjective, and therefore arbitrary, interpretations of the Bible.³⁵ R. Ibn Ezra, while maintaining that all the commandments require explanation by means of transmission (*midivrey qabalah*),³⁶ at the same time gave fundamental importance to rational thought.³⁷ Spinoza's project of

³² R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 112

³³ Rashbam on *Deuteronomy* III, 13

³⁴ R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 112

³⁵ R. Pinhas Weis, 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-ha-Qar'aym be-Halakah. *Melilah*. I, 1944, 35-53. On the relations of R. Ibn Ezra to the Karaites, cf. Daniel Frank, Ibn Ezra and the Karaite Exegetes Aaron ben Joseph and Aaron ben Elijah, in Fernando Diaz Esteban *et al.* (Eds.), *Abraham Ibn Ezra y su Tiempo*. Madrid: Asociación Espanola de Orientalistas, 1990, 99-107. However, it has been possible to emphasize the ambiguous position of R. Ibn Ezra in relation to the biblical Karaite hermeneutics, combining both an attitude of rejection and agreement with some of their interpretations. R. Menahem M. Kasher (1875-1983) has suggested that the passages marking R. Ibn Ezra's agreement with the Karaites were late additions by the copyists of his manuscripts. R. Menahem M. Kasher, *Torah Shlemah*. VIII, Jerusalem, Beyt Torah Shlemah, 1992, 254-255. However, Raphael Itshaq (Zinger) Zer has challenged this thesis of the late addition, showing the agreement of R. Ibn Ezra with some Karaite commentators. Raphael Itshaq Zer, Raby Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-parshanut ha-Miqr'a ha-Qar'ayt. *Megadim*, 2000, 32, 100.

³⁶ R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*. Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, Second Edition, 2007, 70

³⁷ Yoseph Cohen, *Hagut ha-filosofyt shel R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramleh, Shay, 1996, 121-139; David Lemler, [Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive](#). *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 460-461.

reducing the biblical text to a purely human editorial text was based on the particular use he made of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra. This project played a fundamental role in the development of deistic thought and the beginnings of Biblical Criticism.³⁸

To account for the obscurities of R. Ibn Ezra's commentaries, it is necessary to take into account the possibility, evoked by certain super-commentaries such as R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah, regarding a corruption of R. Ibn Ezra's texts, as well as attempts at some textual emendation.³⁹ Michael Friedlander reports the Introduction to the work *Beyt ha-'azzer*, where R. Benjamin Espinoza (eighteenth century) "regrets that attacks were made on Ibn Ezra. He quotes the correspondence between R. Raphael Ashkenazi and R. Gamaliel Monsilos and the letter of R. Gad dil Aquila to R. Abiad, adding that he heard of R. Chananyah Kazis in the name of Tachkemoni, that many of the impugned passages in Ibn Ezra's writings were added by Ibn Ezra's son, who had become a Mahomedan."⁴⁰

The verses quoted by Spinoza to demonstrate that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch

According to Spinoza, R. Ibn Ezra did not mention "neither the totality nor the most important" (*nec omnia, nec praecipua*) editorial problems that can be identified in the *Pentateuch*. Thereby, the text of *Deuteronomy* III contains other interpolations. For example, in verses III, 13-14, the post-mosaic historian would have added this explanation to Moses' words: "Jair the son of Manasseh took all the country of Argob unto the coasts of Geshuri and Maachathi; and called them after his own name, Bashan-havoth-Jair, unto this day." For Spinoza, these clarifications provide information that will only be available later, as reported in the verse of I *Chronicles* II, 21-22, thus clearly proving that this information was provided by a historian, who later explained Moses' words. This historian, knowing both the names of the countries that were then common in the time of Moses, as well as their late names, was thus able to make correspondences between the different periods. Now, if it is true that the *Chronicles* constitute a true book of history,⁴¹ it can in no way be deduced from this book that

³⁸ Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. London, Routledge, 2003, 25

³⁹ Hayyim Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishab qadmoney mefarsbey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezra's*, 42, note 31 and 48, note 47. Tamas Visi quotes another commentator, apparently anonymous, who also supports the thesis of the corruption of the original texts of R. Ibn Ezra. Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. Ph.D. dissertation. Budapest, 2006, 56, note 132.

⁴⁰ Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 248

⁴¹ Cf. Itshaq Klymy, *Sefer Divrey Ha-yamym. Ktyvah bystoryt ve-'emça'ym syfrutyym*. Jerusalem, M.

their author, who, according to the *Talmud*, is precisely Ezra,⁴² also wrote these verses of *Deuteronomy* III, 13-14. The *Radaq* (R. David Qimhy, 1160-1235) emphasizes that this account of *the Chronicles* only specifies the genealogy of Jair which is mentioned in *Deuteronomy*.⁴³ The translators of the *TTP* have noted that these last remarks, which Spinoza refers to R. Ibn Ezra, do not concern R. Ibn Ezra, but take up a thesis developed by Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676), whose work *Praeadamitae* Spinoza owned.⁴⁴

Spinoza then gives four examples of textual problems, which he considered to be crucial to prove that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*:⁴⁵

1. The books of *Exodus*, *Leviticus* and *Numbers* not only speak of "Moses in the third person, but they also give many testimonies about him" (*Mose non tantum in tertia persona loquatur, sed quod insuper de eo multa testetur*), while in *Deuteronomy* "Moses speaks and relates his deeds in the first person" (*loquitur suaeque facta narrat Moses in prima persona*). For Spinoza, "All this - a way of speaking, an external testimony, the very context of the whole of history fully persuades us that these books were written not by Moses, but by someone else" (*Quae omnia, nempe modus loquendi, testimonia, et ipse totius historiae contextus plane suadent hos libros ab alio, non ab ipso Mose fuisse conscriptos*).

2. The end of *Deuteronomy* affirms that "No prophet, equal to Moses, ever arose in Israel who knew God face to face." This comparison made with all the other prophets who lived after him, cannot be of Moses himself, for 'Moses ... could not give it himself, nor one of his immediate successors: he is one who lived many centuries later (*Quod sane testimonium non Moses ipse de se, nec alius, qui eum immediate secutus est, sed aliquis, qui multis post saeculis vixit*). Indeed, the affirmation of *Deuteronomy* involves a much later narrator who, logically, lived at least at the time of the last three prophets of the beginning of the Second Temple, who were precisely contemporaries of Ezra.

3. Some places are not called by the names that were not then in use at the time of Moses, but they refer to later names. Thus, the text of *Genesis* 14:14 tells us that Abraham pursued his enemies as far as *Dan*, "whereas that city did not receive that name until long after the death of Joshua" (*haec urbs non obtinuit, nisi longe post mortem Joshua*), as recorded in the book of *Judges* 18:29.

4. The narratives sometimes relate to post-mosaic events. In this way, the verse of *Exodus* 16:35 tells us that the Children of Israel ate manna

Bialik, 2000

⁴² *Bab'a Batr'a* 15a, cf. Nahmanides, *Sefer Ha-G'eulah. Kitvey Ha-Ramban*, Jerusalem, M. ha-Rav Kook, II, 272.

⁴³ *Radaq* on *Chronicles* I, II, 22

⁴⁴ Jacqueline Lagrée, Pierre-François Moreau, *TTP Translators*, 741, note 17. Cf. I. La Peyrère, *Praeadamitae*. Amsterdam, Louis & Daniel Elzevier, 1655, 186-187.

⁴⁵ Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 4, 332-335

for forty years, until they arrived in the territories that were then inhabited by Canaan. As this location is described in the book of *Joshua* 5:12, it was therefore not available in Moses' day. Spinoza points out the same difficulty regarding the verse of *Genesis* 36:31, "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the Children of Israel." "Undoubtedly, the historian here relates that the Idumeans had kings before David subdued them and established garrisons in Idumea" (*Narrat sine dubio ibi historicus, quos reges Idumaei habuerint, antequam David eos subegit et praesides in ipsa Idumaea constituit*). Now, since these are the Idumean kings whom David defeated, as it is related in II *Samuel*, 8:14, and therefore Moses could not have been the author of this verse.

From the exposition of these textual difficulties, Spinoza concludes that the entire *Pentateuch* was not written by Moses, but by another author much later. It should be noted that the four arguments are not homogeneous: the first two are narrative, while the last note an editorial anachronism.

Concerning the first two examples, let us remember that Spinoza took from R. Ibn Ezra his method of contextual hermeneutics.⁴⁶ Apparently based on the super-commentary *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, he pointed out a distinction between what Frege would call direct speech and reported speech.⁴⁷ Wishing to prove that the biblical narrator was not always Moses, Spinoza goes far beyond this distinction of narratological order, but he slips without transition from the question of the narrator to that of the biblical author, then to that of the Divine Speaker, and he ends up concluding that the biblical text cannot be of divine origin. Now, this conclusion proceeds from the fact that he sees a contradiction between the extensional procedures of Moses' direct discourse in *Deuteronomy*, as *oratio recta*, and the intensional procedures of the reported discourse as *oratio obliqua*, presented by Moses in the second, third, and fourth books of the *Pentateuch*. I will return later on the importance of this semantic distinction.

The third difficult example noted by Spinoza concerns the anachronism of the evocation of toponyms such as that of Dan. Let us recall that the *Talmud Sanhedryn* 96a had already considered this question, and it had then specified that Dan is mentioned because Abraham received a prophetic vision there, indicating to him that his descendants would practice idolatry there, as it is related in the book of I *Kings* 12:29. On the

⁴⁶ Amos Funkenstein, Comment on Richard Popkin's Paper. In *The Books of Nature and Scripture. International Archives of the History of Ideas*. 139, 1994, 21

⁴⁷ Gottlob Frege, On sense and reference. English translation, reprinted in Adrian W. Moore (Ed.) *Meaning and Reference*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, 23-42; Paula Gherasin, Expression linguistique de la subjectivité dans le discours et le discours rapporté. *Cahiers de Linguistique Française*. 25, 2003, 208.

other hand, another version of R. Ibn Ezra states that in this verse the term Dan refers to a different place (*'eyn zu shem Dan ha-yadu'a 'el'a 'aheret*) than the one that will be known and mentioned in the time of the *Kings*, while the standard edition of R. Ibn Ezra does not comment on this problem of anachronism at all.⁴⁸

The fourth difficult example, which does not refer to the verse of *Exodus* 16:34, to which Spinoza mistakenly refers, but to the next verse, apparently concerns the post-Mosaic period during which the Children of Israel, having arrived at the border of the territory of Canaan, then ceased to eat manna. According to commentators, this verse prophetically describes the history of this meta-natural food that was available for forty years. As Rashi *ad locum* explains, the manna stopped falling on the day of Moses' death, so he had still witnessed this last miracle, which occurred on the 7th of the month of Adar. However, its abundance was such that it was sufficient for the subsistence of the People for more than five weeks, until the 16th of the month of Nisan.

As for the question of the kings of Edom who reigned before there was a king in Israel (*Genesis*, 36: 31), mention should be made of the diatribes of R. Ibn Ezra against a certain Itsḥaqy who suggested, in a pre-spinozist style, that this verse was written only in the time of Jehoshafat. R. Ibn Ezra then specified that his book "deserves to be burned" (*r'any lehisaref*).⁴⁹ He emphasizes that the first king in Israel was Moses, because, as Nahmanides (R. Mosheh ben Nahman, 1194-1270) noted, the Idumean kings had ceased to reign in his time, without there being any need to place them in the distant future.⁵⁰ As a result, R. Ibn Ezra would certainly have disavowed Spinoza's use of his writings, as well as Spinoza's reduction of

⁴⁸ Cf. Gershon Brin, *She'elot hybur we-'arykah be-Miqr'a beperusho shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. Te'udah*, VIII, 1992, 127. Regarding his remark on the toponym Dan, Spinoza may have been influenced by the comment of R. Shim'on ben Tsemah Duran, who hypothesized a late interpolation. Cf. Abraham Joshua Heshel, *Torah min ha-Shamaym beaspeqlari'a shel ha-dorot*. London, New York, Soncino Press, 1965, 393

⁴⁹ Various opinions have been expressed regarding the identity of this author. The *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 11 thinks that this is R. Ytshaq ben Yeshush. On the contrary, R. Yaacov Rifman emphasizes that it must be a surname and not a first name, *Toldot 'Ari Mishpahat Rapaport*. Vienna, 1872, 13. Uriel Simon, after having reported several theses, leans towards R. Jonah Ibn Janah, Who was the Proponent of Lexical Substitution Whom Ibn Ezra Denounced as a Prater and a Madman? In *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, Barry Walfish (Ed.) Vol.1, Haifa, Haifa University Press, 1993, 217-232. It should also be noted that according to the *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 31, R. Ibn Ezra's criticism of Itsḥaqy cannot be applied to his own commentaries since Itsḥaqy's remark concerns an entire section, "parashah shlemah," while R. Ibn Ezra's remarks do not refer to verses which, even if moved, do not change their meaning. Uriel Simon emphasizes the difficulties of such a distinction, 'Ozen Mylyn Tivḥan. *Mehqarym bedarko ha-parshanyt shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2013, 293-294.

⁵⁰ R. Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides on *Genesis* 36: 31. *Midrash Rabah*, B'ereshty, XLIII.

the Biblical text to a purely human editorial history. Nevertheless, the Spinozist interpretation of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra played a crucial role in the development of deistic thought as well as in the elaboration of the foundations of biblical criticism.⁵¹

Spinoza and the Hermeneutics of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

R. Ibn Ezra's interpretations are often non-literal,⁵² and the ambiguities they entail have strongly influenced Spinoza's critical reading of the *Pentateuch*, apparently based on several super-commentaries that Spinoza seems to have consulted. However, in 1671, one year after the publication of the *TTP*, Johannes Melchior (1646-1689) sought to refute, apparently based on some super-commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, the six theses that Spinoza attributed to him.⁵³ And in 1678, a year after Spinoza's death, Richard Simon (1638-1712), while postulating that parts of the *Pentateuch* were written after Moses, and in particular by Ezra, has also criticized Spinoza's use of R. Ibn Ezra's commentary. He pointed out that the Spinozist interpretation of this commentary "only proves that some additions have been inferred to the ancient acts, which cannot be denied to be by Moses, or at least to have been written in his time and by his order... he is manifestly mistaken, in that he believed that passages in *Deuteronomy* and the book of *Joshua* ... mentions the whole Law of Moses."⁵⁴ Similarly, two years after Spinoza's death, his interpretation of R. Ibn Ezra was challenged point by point by Pierre Daniel Huet. He also criticized the approaches of Isaac Lapeyrère and Thomas Hobbes questioning the authorship of Moses on certain biblical passages, as well as Elias Levitas on the late character of Hebrew vowels.⁵⁵ For R. Solomon Zalman Netter (1801-1879), all the verses whose Mosaic authorship has been disputed on the basis of certain commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, were prophetically

⁵¹ Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 25

⁵² H. Norman Strickman, Abraham ibn Ezra's Non-Literal Interpretations. *Hakirah*. 9, 2010, 281-296

⁵³ J. Melchioris, *Epistola ad amicum, continens censuram libri, cui titulus: Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Utrecht, Cornelius Noenaert, 1671, 35-36. On the importance of Spinoza's criticism by Johannes Melchior and its repercussions on the Dutch Reformed theologians, cf. Albert Gootjes, The First Orchestrated Attack on Spinoza: Johannes Melchioris and the Cartesian Network in Utrecht. *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 79, 1, 2018, 23-43.

⁵⁴ R. Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*. Reproduction of the New Edition published in Rotterdam in 1685. Frankfurt, Minerva, G.M.B.H. 1967, Preface, without pagination.

⁵⁵ Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica*. Paris, 1679, 141-142. Huet had met R. Menasheh ben Israel in 1652 in Amsterdam. Cf. A. G. Shelford, Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet's "Demonstratio evangelica" (1679). *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 63, 4, 2002, 601.

enunciated.⁵⁶ And according to Michael Friedlander (1833-1910), R. Ibn Ezra adheres entirely to the tradition, positing that Moses was indeed the author of the *Pentateuch*.⁵⁷

Spinoza's reading of R. Ibn Ezra has thus been described as highly "ironic," insofar as the main concern of this author was first of all to unveil the real harmony between the written law and the oral law, in order to preserve the unity of the Jewish Tradition and to defend it against any kind of historical or textual dispute.⁵⁸ In this sense, the use of the oral Law as a hermeneutical complement to the written Law remained fundamental for R. Ibn Ezra, since he specifies that "the Oral Torah is the explanation of the Written Torah" (*Torah shebe-'al peh sheu' perush ha-Torah shebe-ktav*).⁵⁹ It aimed first of all to develop a biblical hermeneutic capable of criticizing the Christian and Karaite interpretations that similarly rejected the oral law.⁶⁰ Now, Spinoza could not transgress the two principles they had laid for the study of the Bible: first, "to treat only of what concerns Scripture alone" (*quae solam Scripturam spectant*),⁶¹ that is, only of the written law; and second, to reject all rabbinic commentary, since the "rabbis are completely delusional" (*Rabini namque plane delirant*).⁶²

It therefore seems completely paradoxical that Spinoza could rely on the authority of R. Ibn Ezra in order to contest the traditional Mosaic authorship of the *Pentateuch*, while R. Ibn Ezra did not cease to affirm his fidelity to the rabbinic tradition. Recall that Spinoza quotes R. Ibn Ezra's commentary on the verse of *Esther* 9:32, suggesting that this book has been lost (*we'avad ha-sefer*), in order to prove that this book, as well as those of *Daniel*, *Ezra*, and *Nehemiah*, were written by a "single historian" (*uno eodemque historico*), and therefore that Mordecai could not have been the author.⁶³ However, Spinoza fails to recall the *Introduction* of R. Ibn Ezra to the Book of *Esther*, where he explicitly wrote: "It seems to me correct to affirm (*nakon*

⁵⁶ R. Shlomo Zalman Netter, *Perush 'al Ibn Ezra on Deuteronomy*, 1: 2 and on *Deuteronomy* 34:1. In *Hamysbah Humsbey Torah*, Wien, 1859. It should be noted that according to Gad Freudenthal, this super-commentary by R. Ibn Ezra is not by R. Shlomo Zalman Netter, but it was written by R. Abraham Nager. Gad Freudenthal, *Abraham Nager's Super-commentary on Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Leviticus and its Erroneous Ascription to R. Salomon Netter* (1859). *Alei Sefer*, 26/27, 2007, 265-276.

⁵⁷ Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 65-66

⁵⁸ Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 25

⁵⁹ R. Ibn Ezra on *Exodus* 19:9

⁶⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Abraham Ibn Ezra as an exegete*. In Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Eds). *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*. Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993, 5

⁶¹ Spinoza, *TTP*, I, 5, 82-83

⁶² Spinoza, *TTP*, IX, 11, 366-367

⁶³ Spinoza, *TTP*, X, 10, 394-395; R. Ibn Ezra on *Esther* 9: 32

be'eynay) that this scroll was written by Mordecai."⁶⁴ Similarly, Spinoza refers to R. Ibn Ezra, suggesting that the verse in *Genesis* 35:2 reporting Jacob's instructions to keep away foreign gods, implies that Jacob was previously a polytheist. However, R. Ibn Ezra explicitly rejects such a hypothesis: "God forbids" (*halylah*, *halylah*).⁶⁵

It should be noted that if the interpretations of R. Ibn Ezra sometimes differ from those of the *Talmud*, it is only in the case where the *Talmud* puts forward ideas that do not proceed from Tradition itself, but from personal opinions interpolated in the homelic narratives (*'agadot*).⁶⁶ According to R. Ibn Ezra, these opinions can be criticized only on the condition that the new interpretation does not contradict the rabbinic legislation (*halak^{ah}*) which can never be questioned.⁶⁷ Similarly, he recognizes the importance of the Masoretes, described as "Guardians of the Temple walls" (*Shomrey Humot ha-Miqdash*), who were able to preserve the scriptural tradition.⁶⁸

It should be noted that the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra innovated by introducing into his biblical commentary a considerable amount of scientific elements. It refers to astrological (*hokmat ha-mazalot*), geometrical (*hokmat ha-midot*), astronomical (*toledet ha-shamayim*), psychological (*hokmat*

⁶⁴ R. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to the Commentary on *Esther* I, 1; David Lemler, [Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive](#). *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 439.

⁶⁵ Spinoza, *TTP*; II, 14, 136-137; R. Abraham Ibn Ezra on *Genesis* 35:2 and on *Deuteronomy* 31:16; Warren Zev Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." 41, note 3.

⁶⁶ On this point, it should be remembered that R. Shlomo Luria (1510-1573) sharply criticized R. Ibn Ezra, pointing out that, not being himself a true Talmudist, he opposed the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*, according to the criteria proper to his understanding alone. The fact that his sometimes-disconnected understanding of tradition may have strengthened the opinions of heretics, Sadducees, and those with some weaknesses in religious matters (*galei e'munah*). R. Shlomo Luria, *Yam shel Shlomo*, Maseket *Hulyn*, Haqdamah R'ishonah. Offenbach, 1718, 3. R. S. Luria's criticism was taken up by R. Moshe Isserles (1520-1572). On the different perceptions of R. Ibn Ezra by the rabbinical authorities, cf. R. Z. L'ahra'ar, Ha-'Eben 'Ezr'a be-'eyney gedoley ha-dorot. *Tsfonot*. 3, 1989, 80-86. However, Maimonides spoke of R. Ibn Ezra in very complimentary terms. Thus, he wrote to his son, R. Abraham, that R. Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on the *Pentateuch*, has unveiled profound secrets that only those who are at his level are really able to understand. Musar n'ahel me'od miHa-Rambam z'l. 'Iygroth Ha-Rambam. In *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam ve-'Iygrotyav*. Heleq Sheny, Leipzig 1859, 9. The thesis of R. Ibn Ezra's opposition to the rabbis of the Talmud has been nuanced by A. Cohen, Raby Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a : Ha-'umnam benygd le-Hazal? *Qulmus*, 2005, 27, 87-97.

⁶⁷ R. Ibn Ezra on *Genesis* XXII, 4; cf. H. Norman Strickman, Abraham Ibn Ezra's Non-Literal Interpretations. *Hakirah*, 9, 2010, 281-282.

⁶⁸ R. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer Me'oznayim*. Offenbach, 1791, 1. In his work *Yesod Mor'a ve-sod Torah*, R. Ibn Ezra uses the expression "guardians of the city walls" (*shomrey humot ha-'Iyr*). R. A. Ibn Ezra, Y. Cohen, U. Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a ve-sod Torah*. 67.

ba-nefesh), rhetorical knowledge (*hokmat ba-mint'a*),⁶⁹ while resorting to Aristotelian philosophy.⁷⁰ Thus, the influence that R. Ibn Ezra may have had on the sages of his generation in many areas⁷¹ actually contradicts the cleavage posed by Spinoza between Reason and Revelation, because for the author of the *TTP*: "Theology is not the handmaid of reason, nor reason that of theology" (*Nec theologiam rationi, nec rationem theologiae ancillari ostenditur*).⁷² At the same time, this recourse to external elements posited by R. Ibn Ezra as necessary for biblical hermeneutics is in opposition to the Spinozist principle of "scriptura sola,"⁷³ requesting that we remain solely reliant on Scripture.

R. Ibn Ezra's commentaries have raised serious questions among his readers, especially those dealing with the last twelve verses of *Deuteronomy* (34:1-34:12).⁷⁴ Before him, the *Talmud* expressed two opinions concerning the author of the last eight verses. The first states that this writing was posthumous, and it was carried out by Joshua under divine dictation,⁷⁵ while the second opinion specifies that these verses were indeed written by Moses, but with his "tears" (*bedim'a*), also under divine dictation.⁷⁶ In this sense, R. Shmuel Tsarçah specifies that R. Ibn Ezra, while recalling that Joshua had written the last verses of the *Pentateuch*, in fact did not adhere to this thesis (*'eyno sover zeh*), but that he really thought that these verses were said to Moses by prophecy (*ne'emru le-Mosheh bederekh nevu'ah*), who then wrote them also by prophecy (*kata'v benevu'ah*).⁷⁷ In any case, as R. Shmuel Motot (late 14th century) points out, R. Ibn Ezra suggests that, in accordance with the traditional reading, Moses addresses himself by

⁶⁹ R. Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a ve-sod Torah*. 80; Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*. Leiden, Brill, 2003, 257-258.

⁷⁰ Mariano Gómez Aranda, *Aristotelian Theories in Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentaries to the Bible*. *Mediterranea: International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*. 3, 2018, 35-54

⁷¹ R. Yehuda Masqony, *Haqdamah le-'Eben ha-'Ezer*. In A. Berliner, D. Hoffmann (Eds.), *'Ozar tov*. Berlin, 1878, 3

⁷² Spinoza, *TTP*, XIV, 1, 482-483; J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 4. Commentators have disagreed on whether the *TTP* sought to expound a radically atheistic thesis or to develop an unorthodox theology through dual teaching. For a summary of the various theses, see Steven Frankel, *Spinoza's dual teaching of Scripture: His Solution to the Quarrel between Religion and Revelation*. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*. 84, 2002, 274-275.

⁷³ Spinoza, *TTP*, I, 6, 81-82

⁷⁴ Aaron Mondschein, "Yesh lo sod we-hamaskyl ydom": Misygnono ha-'enygmato shel Ha-Rav 'Eben 'Ezra 'ad ha-'arakat 'iyshyuto. *Sbenaton leheqer ha-Miqra' ve-ha-Mizraḥ ha-Qadum*. XIV, 2004, 257-288; cf. Yehuda. L. Pel Ish'ar, *Perushym leperush R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezra la-Miqra'.* *'Ozar ha-Hayyim*, 10-11, 1935, 176-177.

⁷⁵ *Bab'a Batra* 14b

⁷⁶ *Bab'a Batra* 15a

⁷⁷ R. Shmuel Tsarçah, *Meqor Hayyim*. In R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Tovah*, 134b

prophecy to future generations, without ever insinuating, as suggested by the author of the *Tsafnat Pa'eneah* (while noting that they were dictated by prophecy), and Spinoza after him (but without mentioning such a precision), that Moses was not the author of these verses.⁷⁸

However, Yehuda Leib Krinsky (19th century) specifies that the thesis of the late addition of these passages is based on a pure misunderstanding of their literal meaning. To legitimize such a thesis, it would first be necessary to understand the true intention of these authors to make such additions, and then the purpose for which they undertook to correct the text of the *Pentateuch*, thus considered to be originally "defective." In spite of all the obscure allusions of R. Ibn Ezra, it is impossible to postulate, as Spinoza does, that according to R. Ibn Ezra thought Moses was not himself the author of the *Pentateuch*. He only suggested that some verses were not transcribed by Moses, but never claimed that they could not have a divine origin.⁷⁹ In this sense, he did not adopt the theory of an interpolation of verses, or even the possibility of a late alteration, even if he attributes the writing of the last verses of the *Pentateuch* to Joshua, under divine dictation.⁸⁰ R. Ibn Ezra himself rejected the hypothesis that some verses may have been written after the Mosaic writing. As I mentioned earlier, in his commentary on *Genesis* 36:31, he objects to the explanation of a certain Yishaqy who reported the writing of the verse concerning the kings of Edom in the time of Jehoshaphat. It should be remembered that the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* mentioned several versions of the *Pentateuch*, with minimal differences, despite all the precautions taken by the scribes regarding the transmission and copying of manuscripts. They recalled that three versions of the Torah had been found in the Court of the Second Temple and that the copies were then amended according to the majority of versions, while in the Ark of the First Temple was placed the scroll written by Moses himself, which was free of any error.⁸¹ The secularist reasoning that Spinoza tried to find in R. Ibn Ezra is in fact a circular reasoning. It can be summarized in the following way: insofar as God is nature, there can be no other laws than the natural laws, thus excluding any idea of divine will and Sinaiic Revelation, since the natural law is necessary while the biblical law remains contingent. Unlike the second law, the first cannot be annulled. In this sense, Adam and Eve could have transgressed the prohibition of eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they could not have transgressed the law of

⁷⁸ R. Shmuel Motot, *Perush 'al perush. Megilat setarym*. Venice, 1554, 46a

⁷⁹ R. Yehuda L. Krinsky, *Mehoqueqey Yehuda 'al Devarym, Qarney 'Or*. Vilna, 1928, 2a ,

⁸⁰ Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 62-65

⁸¹ *Mishnah Soferym* VI, 4, mentioned by Spinoza in the *TTP*, IX, 20, 380-381; *Talmud Yerushalmy, Ta'anyt* IV, 2, 68a.

the falling bodies.⁸² Spinoza, in denying Jewish tradition, could not believe that the Torah was written in a meta-natural way, and that it was therefore also able to describe future events.

Historians such as Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), have taken up Spinoza's interpretation of Ibn Ezra, noting that "in dark and enigmatic meanders (*in dunkeln, rathselhaften Wendungen*)" R. Ibn Ezra has made it clear that some passages of the *Pentateuch* were not written by Moses, but were added late.⁸³ However, one may wonder, as R. Mordekay Breuer (1921-2007) does, how Spinoza could have distorted the words of R. Ibn Ezra to such an extent in order to defend his own theses, thus transforming an authentic Jewish thinker into a heretic.⁸⁴ Criticizing the position of Israel Knohl, who followed the Spinozist interpretation, R. Mordekay Breuer replies that such a view is in fact the result of a fundamental methodological error, which derives from the prejudicial idea that the Torah is a human work, thus allowing us to suppose that it was written by several people. This approach is based on arbitrary approaches which forge arbitrary methods of analysis, cut off from the traditional rules of interpretation. They can never contradict the Monotheist principle that the Torah proceeds from Revelation, and is "min ha-Shamaym," of divine origin, because it was God Himself, not Moses or any other prophet, who wrote it and then passed it on to them.⁸⁵ As Amos Funkenstein points out, nothing was as far removed from the thought of R. Ibn Ezra as the idea of questioning the authenticity and revealed character of Scripture. He developed a hermeneutical principle known as "accommodation," which made it possible to resolve a good number of scriptural difficulties; a principle that was misrepresented by Spinoza in order to base a secularized textual critique. This is why R. Ibn Ezra cannot appear as Spinoza's predecessor.⁸⁶ Spinoza's approach consisted in maintaining the traditional terms, while radically transforming their meaning. He thus retained the notions of general and providences, but he reduced them to two distinct modes of natural legislation.⁸⁷ He also seems to have understood literally the Talmudic remark that Scripture speaks the language of men (*dybrah Torah kelashon bney 'adam*), in support of

⁸² David Biale, *Not in the Heavens: The Secular Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010, 26

⁸³ Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*. Bd. VI.: *Vom Aufblühen der jüdisch-spanischen Kultur 1027 bis Maimunis Tod*. Leipzig, Leiner, Reedition, 1870, 207

⁸⁴ R. Mordekay Breuer, 'Emunah we-Mad'a beParshanut ha-Miqr'a. *De'ot*. 11, 1960, 18-24. Israel Knohl, Beyn 'Emunah lebyqoret. *Megadim*, 33, 2001, 123-126

⁸⁵ R. Mordekay Breuer, 'Al Byqoret ha-Miqr'a. *Megadim*, 30, 1999, 97-101

⁸⁶ David Lemler, [Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive](#). *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 456

⁸⁷ Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, V; Jacqueline Lagrée, *La raison ardente*. Natural Religion and Reason in the Seventeenth Century. Paris, Vrin, 1991, 195

his thesis that the author of the Bible is himself human.⁸⁸

Commentators agree that Spinoza did not properly read the texts of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. Thus, for example, Warren Zev Harvey points out that Spinoza "exaggerates" by asserting that, according to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*, when he had only suggested that certain passages could have been written by Joshua.⁸⁹ According to Steven Nadler, R. Ibn Ezra never affirmed the denial of the Mosaic origin of the *Pentateuch*.⁹⁰ Raphael Jospe notes that the questions asked by R. Ibn Ezra were not ideological in nature, seeking, for example, to determine who was really the author of the last verses of *Deuteronomy*, but they were geographical. Thus, R. Ibn Ezra asks: "Does a common name necessarily refer to a place in the Western land of Israel later known by the Jews, or can it also refer to some place the Israelites came across in eastern trans-Jordan prior to the conquest of the land."⁹¹ In fact, as Uriel Simon points out, Spinoza did not grasp the true hermeneutical intention of R. Ibn Ezra, whose concern was above all to remain faithful to tradition and not to criticize it (*ne'emanutyt ve-l'o byquraty*). As a result, Spinoza tried to project onto the writings of R. Ibn Ezra his theoretical presuppositions that were foreign to him, thus remaining at odds with his commentaries.⁹²

Spinoza and the super-commentaries on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

Spinoza, posing as the only valid interpreter of R. Ibn Ezra, also considered himself as his continuator, and as a result he then described as scaffolding (*bariolar*) the traditional interpretations that differed from his own.⁹³ Although he directly studied the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, he seems to have been mainly influenced by the super-commentaries on R. Ibn

⁸⁸ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1986, 219-220; *Nedarym* 3a.

⁸⁹ Warren Z. Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." In Y. Y. Melamed, M. A. Rosenthal (Eds), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise. A Critical Guide*, 41-55

⁹⁰ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, 109

⁹¹ Raphael Jospe, Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophic Literary Genre: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Moses Maimonides. In Emil L. Fackenheim & Raphael Jospe (Eds), *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*. Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, 58. This remark seems to be able to qualify what has been called the "historical criticism" of R. Ibn Ezra, which would thus have influenced Spinoza's theses. N. Sarna, Abraham Ibn Ezra as an Exegete. In Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Eds). *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*. 17.

⁹² Uriel Simon, *Dynqan shel parshan – R.'Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 2021, 195

⁹³ Spinoza, *TTP* VIII, 3, 328-329, David Lemler, [Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive](#). *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 451

Ezra, which began to appear in the 13th and 14th centuries.⁹⁴ It is possible that the Spinozist thesis of the post-mosaic redaction of the *Pentateuch* was suggested to him by R. Eleazar ben Mortarthias, who wrote, in Byzantium between 1285 and 1295, a super-commentary on R. Ibn Ezra, affirming that Ezra was in fact the author of the *Pentateuch*. However, the thesis of R. Eleazar ben Mortarthias differs fundamentally from that of Spinoza, since he emphasizes the prophetic essence of Scripture.⁹⁵ Similarly, R. Shmuel Motot (second half of the 14th century) emphasizes that according to R. Ibn Ezra the 12 verses were dictated to Moses by prophecy.⁹⁶

One of the sources that leads us to think R. Ibn Ezra affirmed the non-Mosaic authorship of certain verses of the *Pentateuch* concerns his commentary on *Leviticus* 16:8. He points out that the scapegoat (*š'eyr le-'Az'az'el*) that was brought on the Day of Atonement (*yom ha-ḥupurym*) was not a sacrifice, and its name itself contains a mystery (*sod*), and that there are others in Scripture (*yesh lo haverym be-Migr'a*). He adds: "And I will reveal to you a part of this secret, by allusion, and you will know it when you have reached the age of thirty-three years (*we-'any 'egaleh leka qcat ha-sod beremez bihyotka ben shloshym we-shalosh ted'eno*). According to R. Ysh'ayah ben M'eyr (13th and 14th centuries), this figure refers to the thirty-three verses which, according to R. Ibn Ezra, were not written by Moses.⁹⁷ In this sense, Spinoza was also able to consult the super-commentary of R. Shlomo Ibn Yaish of Guadalajara (13th century), affirming that according to R. Ibn Ezra thirty-three verses could not reasonably have been written by Moses.⁹⁸ However, Nahmanides, who never failed to criticize R. Ibn Ezra when he seemed to deviate from traditional hermeneutics, does not speak of non-Mosaic verses. He proposes to reveal the secret that R. Ibn Ezra deliberately "hid" (*mekaseh davar*), claiming that the expression 33 years refers to some other 33 verses: the distance between the first mention of Azazel in *Leviticus*

⁹⁴ Cf. Dov Schwartz, *Ledarkey ha-parshanut ha-fylosofyt 'al perushey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. 'Aley Sefer*, 18, 1996, 71-109. Tamas Visi points out that almost all of these super-commentaries were written by Maimonidean philosophers. T. Visi, *Ibn Ezra, a Maimonidean Authority: The Evidence of the Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries*. In James T. Robinson (Ed.), *The cultures of Maimonideanism: new approaches to the history of Jewish thought*. Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2009, 101.

⁹⁵ Warren Z. Harvey, *Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve"*. In *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise. A Critical Guide*. Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Michael A. Rosenthal (Eds), 47, 52-53

⁹⁶ R. Shmuel Motot, In R. Yequy'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Torah*. 136b.

⁹⁷ A. Ysh'ayah ben M'eyr. In H. Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishah qadmoney mefarshy R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. 612

⁹⁸ Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. Ph.D. Dissertation Budapest, Central European University, 2006, 282, note 634. The author quotes the manuscript of R. Shlomo Ibn Yaish, note 637.

16: 8 and the mention of the sacrifices unto the he-goats in *Leviticus* 17:7.⁹⁹ R. Yehuda Mosqony gives another explanation of the interpretation of R. Ibn Ezra. According to him, these are the 33 sin offerings of goats (*ḥaṭ'aot s'eyrym*) that were brought to the Temple each year.¹⁰⁰ Uriel Simon reports other super-commentaries living in the 13th and 14th centuries, such as R. Ysh'ayah of Trany, R. Eliyahu of Sharash, R. Shlomo Franco, R. Ezra Gatinio and R. Shimshon Qyno of Marseille. They insisted, in particular, on R. Ibn Ezra's enigmatic commentary on *Leviticus* 16: 8, which, with regard to the term "Azazel." Some have suggested that this is a geographical anachronism (it would be the future name of a mountain) and a philological anachronism (this term would be of Aramaic origin, and therefore later).¹⁰¹ Simon points out that the 'sacred' character of the Biblical text is not affected by the observation of certain anachronisms. Its prophetic status remains intact, and these anachronisms must be reported to Moses' pre-science regarding future events and referred to the readers of each generation whom the text also addresses. (*'al shem sofo*).¹⁰²

Spinoza seems to follow the interpretations of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha- ha-Ṣfarady, but he does not retain his conclusions, since this author emphasizes that all the additions to the *Pentateuch*, as suggested by R. Ibn Ezra, were of a prophetic nature and therefore did not contradict their divine character. He clarifies that because we believe in tradition (*divrey qabalah*), it does not matter if it was Moses or later prophets who wrote these verses. Their words are also true and proceed from prophecy alone. According to R. Ibn Ezra, if the verse of *Deuteronomy* 4:2 forbade adding to the divine prescriptions (*the o tosyfu*), this prohibition relates only to the commandments (*raq 'al ha-miṣvot*),¹⁰³ and not to words, descriptive or merely informative expressions. The prophets were mainly concerned with the

⁹⁹ Nahmanides, Perush 'al Wayqr'a 16:8. *Kitvey ha-Ramban* II. Jerusalem, M. Ha-Rav Kook, 1960, 88. Concerning the relations of Nahmanides to R. Ibn Ezra, cf. Myriam Seigelraṣ, Darko shel ha-Ramban be'iyumūḥ divrey R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-hav'atam shel'o beshem 'omrym. *Shenaton leḥeker ha-Miqr'a weha-Mizrah ha-qadum*. XXIV, 2016, 285-302.

¹⁰⁰ R. Yehuda Mosqony, 'Even ha-'Ezer. In H. Kreisel (Ed.), *'Even ha-'Ezer*, Ben Gurion University, Makon Bialik, 2021, III, 131

¹⁰¹ Uriel Simon, R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a- Hamefaresh shehayah lemeḥfurash. Toldot ktyvat perushym leperushav mer'eshyt we-'ad teḥylat ha-m'eah ha-ḥamesh 'esreh. Ha-Miqr'a ber'ey mefarshav. *Sefer Zykaron le-Sarah Kamin*. Jerusalem, Magnes, 1994, 386-402. It should be noted that the text of R. Yehuda Ibn Mosqony of Bulgaria, written in 1362, notes that the first super-commentary of R. Ibn Ezra was written by R. Abishai of Sagori, also from Bulgaria, written in 1170, six years after the death of R. Ibn Ezra. In the 14th century, R. Joseph Ibn Caspi, followed by a dozen other authors, renewed the genre of the super-commentary in order to reconcile astrology, Maimonidean philosophy and Kabbalah. Cf. Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 23.

¹⁰² Uriel Simon, 'Oẓen Miḥn Tibḥan. *Meḥqarym bedarko ha-parshanyt shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2013, 412

¹⁰³ R. Ibn Ezra, *'Al Ber'eshyt. Shyṭab 'aḥeret, dyqduq*. 12: 4.

meanings (*ba-ta'amym*) related to the commandments and not to the words (*ba-mylot*).¹⁰⁴ Therefore, if a prophet may have added one or more words to the message he has received in order to explain what has been conveyed to him by this prophecy, this is not an addition. This is why the 70 Sages, who translated the *Pentateuch* into Greek (the Septuagint), were allowed to change 13 things, as explained in the *Mishnah Sofrym* I, 9 and the *Talmud Megillah* 40a.¹⁰⁵

Despite these clarifications, according to R. Abraham Epstein (1841-1918), the author of the *Tsafnat Pa'eneah* not only influenced the writing of the *TTP*, but he would have already prefigured the Spinozist conception of the divine as purely natural (*'Elohey ba-tev'a*). He posited that human happiness consists in acting according to the intellect, from the fact that it can know the laws of nature (*'al py ba-sekel shebiky' et huqey ba-tev'a*).¹⁰⁶ Tamas Visi noted that R. Eleazar ben Mattityah, one of the super-commentators of R. Ibn Ezra of the 13th century, also foreshadows Spinoza, underlining that Ezra, who is said to have censored passages of the *Pentateuch* that might seem problematic for the people, must be considered as its main editor whom he qualifies as a copyist (*ma'atyq*).¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that if R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah seems to express some of Spinozist thesis, his conclusions are fundamentally different from those of the author of the *TTP*. He pointed out that Ezra was also a prophet, and therefore that the writing of the *Pentateuch* was well inspired.¹⁰⁸

For Spinoza, the original intention of the author of the text remains totally limited to the obvious textual meaning, consequently what cannot be documented, immanently, by the text itself cannot be related to the author's intention either. On the contrary, for traditional commentators, meaning remains open to permanent decoding, involving the active participation of the reader. The mere fact that an allusive meaning is suggested by the text, and thus discovered by the reader, means that it was already intended by the

¹⁰⁴ R. Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a ve-sod Torah*, 84-85. Aran Viesel pointed out that for R. Ibn Ezra, in the *Pentateuch*, the meanings are divine, while the words were formulated by Moses. Eran Viesel, "Ha-ta'amym 'Elohyim we-« hamylot shel Mosheh: hashqafato shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezra besh'elat helqo shel Mosheh beKetyvat ha-Torah, meqorotah we-masqenotav. *Tarbiz*, 80, 3, 2012, 387-407

¹⁰⁵ R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. 92

¹⁰⁶ R. Abraham Epstein, *Miqadmonyut Ha-Yehudim*. I. Wien, 1887, 133

¹⁰⁷ R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah, on *Genesis* 12, In Hayim Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishah qadmony mefarshy R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezra*, 122. It should be remembered that the thesis of the "reinvention" of the Law of Moses by Ezra was formulated for the first time by Porphyry (234-305). *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*. Edited and translated with an introduction and epilogue by R. Joseph Hoffmann. New York, Prometheus Books, 1994, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. 289

author without there being any need to provide any other documentary proof.¹⁰⁹ The biblical text has a fundamental pragmatic aspect, which actualizes what Paul Ricoeur calls a "revealing and transforming" dimension.¹¹⁰ However, Spinoza has completely neglected such a dimension, which remains crucial to grasp the narratological essence of the Bible, certainly because of the fact, underlined by Emmanuel Levinas, of a lack of training in Talmudic dialectics. Indeed, following the research of Abraham de Mordechai Vaz Dias & Willem Gerard van der Tak, showing that Spinoza was not included in the register of Jewish studies institutions in Amsterdam,¹¹¹ Levinas thought that he did not know the *Talmud*. He therefore had access only to a « bloodless » Biblical text, and then he remained unable to understand its true meaning.¹¹²

Narratological levels

The *Pentateuch* frequently utilizes the reported speech, by Moses, of the divine Speaker, without using, as Spinoza thought, the subjective structures of the narrator. In this sense, the *Talmud* emphasizes that Moses limited himself to writing the word of God.¹¹³ Therefore, the transmission of the divine reference was, in the case of the Mosaic prophecy, entirely

¹⁰⁹ Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. 235

¹¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*. 3. Paris, Le Seuil, 1985, 229

¹¹¹ Abraham de Mordechai Vaz Dias & Willem Gerard van der Tak, *Spinoza merchant & autodidact. Charter and other authentic documents relating to the philosopher's youth and his relations*. English translation in *Studia Rosenthaliana*. 16, 2, 1982, 153

¹¹² Emmanuel Levinas, Avez-vous relu Baruch? In *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*. Paris, Albin Michel, 1976, 167, note 1. Let us specify that all of Spinoza's references to the *Talmud* concern only his homilies (*'agadot*) and not its dialectical logic, of which Levinas pointed out precisely the absence. Abraham Wolf had specified that it was unlikely that Spinoza had seriously studied the *Talmud*. Abraham Wolf, *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*. London, G.Allen & Ulwil LTD, 1927, 143. Paul Vulliaud noted that Spinoza did not possess a copy of the *Talmud*, nor of his « abstract composed by Maimonides. » Paul Vulliaud, *Spinoza d'après les livres de sa bibliothèque*. Reedition, Paris, Éditions des Malassis, 2012, 33. On Spinoza's disinterest in the *Talmud*, cf. Mino Chamla, *Spinoza e il concetto della 'tradizione ebraica'*. Milano, F.Angeli, 1996, 127.

¹¹³ *Bab'a Batr'a* 14b. However, Rashbam (R. Shmuel ben Meir 1080-1160), grandson of Rashi and contemporary of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, suggests a narratological distinction between the divine word addressed to Moses at Sinai and the writing of the *Pentateuch*. Thus, the whole account of the six days of creation (*mel'eket shishah yamim*) constitutes an explanation given by Moses, in order to introduce to the fourth article of the Decalogue (*Exodus* 20:7), prescribing to remember the day of *Shabbat* (Rashbam on *Genesis* I:1). In this sense, Rashbam distinguishes between the direct discourse of God and the comments of Moses, who then come to explain to the reader the direct divine discourse. Cf. Eran Viesel, *Da'ato shel Rashbam beshe'elat helqo shel Moshe bektyvat ha-Torah. Shenaton leheker ha-Miqr'a weba-Mizrah ha-qadum*. XXII, 2013, 170-171

transparent, whereas for the other prophets it remained opaque. The *Midrash* underlines that before transmitting his prophecy to the Children of Israel, Moses specified: "This is the word (*zeh ha-davar*) of the Tetragrammaton," while the other prophets began the report of their prophecy with: "Thus spoke (*ko 'amar*) the Tetragrammaton." In the first case, the divine Presence spoke directly through the mouth of Moses, while in the second case, the prophets reported the divine message through their perceptual-intellectual structures.¹¹⁴

From a semantic point of view, it could be said that Moses transmitted his prophecy in a direct and consequently extensional way, whereas the other prophets stated their prophecy in an indirect style which, according to Gottlob Frege, denotes a thought and not a proposition.¹¹⁵ It is therefore always accompanied by a referential opacity of an intensional nature.¹¹⁶ The Mosaic prophecy was therefore based on a propositional transparency, where a reported sentence denotes exactly the words of the divine Speaker. It operated according to a discourse that Franz Brentano defined as the right mode (*modus rectus*), whereas the prophecy of the other prophets expressed a propositional opacity, due to a mediation of the words of the divine message through the subjective structures of the prophetic narrator. This last form of prophecy thus belonged to what Brentano called an oblique mode (*modus obliquus*).¹¹⁷ However, as Hector-Neri Castañeda points out, a term appearing in an oblique construction retains its transparency if it reveals exactly the propositional content of the speaker to whom the narrator is directly referring,¹¹⁸ which was precisely the case with all the prophets of Israel, despite their difference in style.¹¹⁹

The account of the event of the *burning bush* is one example among others of what Oswald Ducrot calls "polyphonic authority."¹²⁰ This is described through an embedding of discourses related to the direct style, which combines that of the Speaker (the Tetragrammaton), the narrator (Moses) and that of the alleged recipients of the narrator, i.e. the future protagonists (the Children of Israel and Pharaoh). Also reported is the content of the messages that the narrator Moses – who at first refused his mission, and therefore to be the protagonist – must transmit to the

¹¹⁴ Sifry on *Numbers* XXX, 2.

¹¹⁵ Gottlob Frege, On sense and reference. English translation reprinted in Adrian W. Moore (Ed.) *Meaning and Reference*, 30

¹¹⁶ Cf. Gennaro Chierchia, Intensionality and context change. *Journal of Logic, Language and Information*. 3, 2, 1994, 141-168

¹¹⁷ Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. English translation, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, 345

¹¹⁸ Héctor-Neri Castañeda, *Thinking, language and Experience*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 88

¹¹⁹ *Sanbedryn* 89a

¹²⁰ Oswald Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*. Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1984, 169

protagonist recipients, in the name of the Speaker.¹²¹

In general, changes in the narrative voice cause breaks in the continuity of the narrative. Thus the chief cupbearer tells Pharaoh the story of Joseph's interpretation of his dream, using a *mise en abyme* of a narrative within the narrative, or metadiegetic narrative (that is a part of a story world which is depicted by one of the characters of the primary narrative).¹²² On the other hand, the narrator can become an autonymic commentator himself, producing a discourse quoted from a quotation, as in the verse of *Joshua* VII, 26, affirming that the toponym "Emeq Achor" will still exist at the time the reader will read this story.¹²³ Spinoza tried to transform the real narrative into a fictional narrative, in which the narrator, posed as imaginary, is asked by the real author (Ezra) in order to re-create a fictional narration. However, Spinoza did not pay attention to the fact that the text embeds different narrative levels, a fact that R. Ibn Ezra had nevertheless emphasized. Moreover, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out, the questioning of historical propositions, which are always indirect representations, requires that they be evaluated first according to their truth value, rather than according to their fictional appearance.¹²⁴

The narrator- narratory distinction and the semantic difficulties of the TTP

The *Pentateuch* presents stratified narrative levels, the semantic complexity of which must be understood. Historical criticism, promoted by Spinoza, by separating the text from its rational approach and truth, actually provoked what has been called "The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative," which led to a split between the narrative's apparent reference and its historical significance.¹²⁵ This is why Spinoza, who did not grasp the importance of the narrative stratification of the Biblical text, in fact misunderstood its unitary narrative polyphony, and consequently posited the multiplicity of its authors.

It should be emphasized that Biblical narration is fundamentally different from other literatures of Antiquity, because of its oral and

¹²¹ *Exodus*, III, 10-22; Moses Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1-11*. Second Ed. Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2013, 81-85

¹²² Gérard Genette, *Figures III*. Paris, le Seuil, 1972, 239

¹²³ Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and structure in Biblical Hebrew narrative*. Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2001 125 and 140; *Targum Jonathan and Mezudath David on Joshua VII, 26*. According to Rudolf Carnap, a autonymic expression refers, in the context of a sentence, to a symbol which is used as the name of itself Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*. English translation, London, Kegan Paul, 17.

¹²⁴ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Quelles vérités pour quelles fictions? L'homme*, 175-176, 2005, 27

¹²⁵ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, 44

historical dimension.¹²⁶ If it proceeds from a transfer from the oral to the written or from the epic to the narrative, Moses and then Ezra decreed that the text should be oralized in order to read it publicly, four times a week, part of the weekly pericope, which is itself read in its entirety on *Shabbat* morning.¹²⁷ This preservation of the oral dimension of the *Pentateuch*, which Moshe Idel qualifies as the *Voiced Text of the Torah*,¹²⁸ implies at the same time a relationship, of a pragmatic nature, with the listener. The *Midrash Yalqut Shim'eony* specifies that each reading of the Torah actually updates its donation to Mount Sinai, thus transforming the reader and the listener into real Biblical protagonists.¹²⁹ The addressee of the Biblical text, to whom the effects of reading are addressed, plays the role of what Roland Barthes calls "narratory" (*narrataire*) that is to say, the one – reader or listener – to whom the narrator is addressing.¹³⁰ If, in literary narratives, the narrator and the narratory have only an intradiegetic textual existence, that is to say within the narrative inserted within the narrative,¹³¹ the historical narrative of the Bible also gives them an extradiegetic status, that is to say, external to the narrative, aiming at the Children of Israel as real readers.

To understand the narrative status of Moses in *Deuteronomy*, we can appeal to notions established by Gérard Genette, who distinguishes between two types of narratives. The first is of a heterodiegetic order, where the narrator is absent from the story he is telling, as in the book of Genesis, while the second is of a homodiegetic order, where the narrator is present as a character in the story he is telling, as can be seen in the last four books of the *Pentateuch*. Concerning *Deuteronomy* particularly, Moses, as narrator, presents himself as *autodiegetic*, that is to say, as the main actor in the story and the narrator who is also the protagonist. The necessities of the presentation always require a description in a nested way of describing the relationships between the narrative act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, as well as its relationship to the other narrative situations implied by the narrative.¹³² I think that the narrative difficulties that R. Ibn Ezra has sought to highlight are part of what G. Genette, borrowing the term from Dumarsais, calls narrative metalepsis.¹³³ This is a process that

¹²⁶ Robert S. Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode*. Indiana University Press, 2004, 5, 161, 213

¹²⁷ *Bab'a qam'a* 82a

¹²⁸ Moshe Idel, The voiced text of the Torah. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. 68, 1994, 145-166

¹²⁹ *Midrash Yalqut Shim'eony*, *Ytro*, 271

¹³⁰ Roland Barthes, Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits. *Communications*, 8, 1966, 1-27

¹³¹ Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, 37

¹³² Gérard Genette, *Figures* III, 233 and 252

¹³³ [César C. Dumarsais](#), *Des Tropes ou Des differens sens dans qui on peut prendre un même mot dans une même langue*. Reprint, Paris, Delalain, 1816, 82

leads to a transgression of the boundary between two differentiated narrative levels, the first is that of the narrator of the story and the second is that of the reality described by the story. It is an intrusion of the extradiegetic narrator into the diegetic universe, that is to say, into the course of the narrated events.¹³⁴

Thus, as Gershon Brin points out, R. Ibn Ezra considers Moses to be the editor (*'orek*) of the *Pentateuch*. For example, he emphasizes on the verse of *Genesis* 11:28, that the toponym "Ur Kasdym" certainly had another name, since the name Kasdym will only be given later by the descendants of Nahor, Abraham's brother, but Moses retained it which was then known in his time.¹³⁵ Thus, it becomes possible to report the descriptions of the witnesses of the event to the Mosaic editor itself and not to another author.

Another distinction made by Gérard Genette can help us to understand the different temporal modalities at work in the *Pentateuch*. The chronology can be real, as in the books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, or *Samuel*, or well reported, as in the passages of the *Pentateuch* that I have underlined earlier. In this case, a distinction must be made between *analepsis*, which is a process by which the narrator recounts an event that occurred in the past after the fact has occurred, and *prolepsis*, by which the narrator anticipates future events.¹³⁶ Thus it can be understood that all the cases of anachronism noted by R. Ibn Ezra are prolepsis of a prophetic nature.

From a pragmatical perspective, the case of Moses' description of his own death constitutes what D. J. O'Connor has called a pragmatic paradox, which is a statement that is falsified by its own utterance, such as saying : "I am not speaking now," or "I am dead." In all cases, these are token-reflexive expressions, whose paradoxical character disappears when, for example, the personal pronouns "you" or "he" are substituted for "I."¹³⁷ R. Ibn Ezra's remarks cease to be problematic when they are related to prophetic dictation, which represents a higher narrative level, similar to that posed by Bertrand Russell's ramified theory of types, capable of avoiding

¹³⁴ Gérard Genette, *Figures III*. 244-245

¹³⁵ Gershon Brin, She'elot hybur we-'arykah beMiqr'a beperusho shel R. 'Abraham 'Eben Ezr'a. *Te'udah*, VIII, 1992, 125-126. R. Jospe remarks that the expression used by R. Ibn Ezra, in connection with the verse of *Exodus* VI, 28 "the organizer of the sections" (*mesader ba-parashyot*), seems to indicate a late redaction, *Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophical Literary Genre: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Moses Mendelssohn*. In E. Fackenheim and R. Jospe (Eds). *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*. 1996, 59. It may be objected, however, that the fact that R. Ibn Ezra recognizes Moses as the organizer of the sections of the *Pentateuch* in no way implies that this redaction, even if late, is not by Moses himself.

¹³⁶ Gérard Genette, *Figures III*. 89

¹³⁷ Daniel J. O'Connor, Pragmatic Paradoxes. *Mind*, 57, 1948, 358-359; Pragmatic Paradoxes and Fugitive Propositions. *Mind*. 60, 1951, 536-538.

logical paradoxes.¹³⁸ In this sense, the prophetic metalanguage, describing for example, in *Deuteronomy* 34:5-6 "And Moses died... Buried there" remains compatible with purely descriptive narrative forms. In this regard, Nahmanides emphasized that Moses wrote the entire Torah under divine dictation, from the book of *Genesis* to the construction of the Tabernacle (*Exodus* 25:9-40), and he finished writing it at the end of the forty years of wandering in the desert.¹³⁹

Talmud *Megylah* 7a notes that the biblical narrative is prophetic-historical is using the knowledge of the omniscient narrator, which is not shared by anyone else. For example, the book of *Esther* states, "Haman said in his heart," "Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her," or "And Mordecai knew what was happening." R. ibn Ezra sees in the verse of *Esther* 6: 6 evidence that this book was written prophetically, insofar as only the Creator can know the "secrets of the heart" (*ta'alumot lev*).

In fact, the narrative approach to the Biblical text requires a distinction between the historical *value* of the data, and the historiographic *force* of their representations. The first concerns the objective factuality of events, while the second is a socio-cultural and axiological judgment on the facts, and it can always vary according to the textual context.¹⁴⁰ Actually, if, as a narrative, the Biblical text does not represent a story but tells it, it signifies it by means of language without necessarily imitating the reality described.¹⁴¹ The Bible has greatly developed the technique of points of view, always involving a relationship between subject and object, a perceiving mind and a perceived reality. It thus reflects its own hermeneutical constructions. There is always an incessant interaction between discourse, the world and the type of perspective involved, which together constitute the production of meaning,¹⁴² and therefore divine authorship is not dogmatic, but only semantic. As a result, as Daniel Boyarin points out, all the difficulties that can be identified in the biblical text must then be read "as a central part of the system of meaning production of that text."¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Bertrand Russell, *The Theory of Logical Types*. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 18, 3, 1910, 288-289

¹³⁹ Nahmanides, *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah*. Reedition, Jerusalem, M. ha-Rav Kook, 1959, I, 1

¹⁴⁰ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, 26

¹⁴¹ Gerard Genette, *Nouvelle théorie du récit*. Paris, Seuil, 1983, 29

¹⁴² Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 129

¹⁴³ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* *Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, 40. In a similar style, starting from the narrative, rabbinic exegesis aims to identify a multiplicity, even an infinity of connections and textual sub-units, each carrying a particular aspect of the hermeneutic content of the narrative. Cf. Hanna Liss, *Creating Fictional Worlds: Peshat-Exegesis and Narrativity in Rashbam's*

Conclusion

I have sought to clarify the nature of the relationships between R. Ibn Ezra and Spinoza, who considered himself to be his continuator and his only valid interpreter. This article has analyzed the theses that Spinoza attributed to R. Ibn Ezra. I have thus shown that a precise study of the texts of R. Ibn Ezra demonstrates that in fact, Spinoza only projected his own theses onto this author. Much more, he made her say what he had never insinuated, namely that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*. To do this, I analyze point by point the arguments given by Spinoza in the *TTP*, in the name of R. Ibn Ezra, and its sources in the super-commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, which began to appear in the 13th and 14th centuries. I then appealed to semantic-narratological theories, showing that they are capable of accounting for most of the textual difficulties that Spinoza, as well as several super-commentators of R. Ibn Ezra, were unable to resolve in their reading of the *Pentateuch*. I then specified the status of the Biblical narrator as well as its narratory, and the meaning that should be given to its historicity. I showed that the different forms of Biblical narration always express an integrated interaction between the divine Speaker, the Mosaic narrator, the narratories, and the protagonists of the narratives whose texts are constantly actualized during each of their readings.

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